



OBSERVER COVERAGE FACT SHEET



Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, all Category I or II fishery participants (those with a frequent or occasional level of take) must carry an observer on fishing trips when requested to do so by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) or by a designated contractor providing observer services to NMFS. NMFS may also request that Category III fishing participants (those with rare or unknown takes of marine mammals) carry an observer on a voluntary basis.

Observer Programs are a vital component of the fishery management process because they are one of the best ways to gather current data on the status of marine fisheries.



As a fishery participant, your cooperation is important to help NMFS collect the most complete, unbiased, and relevant data possible. Good data prevents over-regulation and ensures the sustainability of our fisheries and the conservation of protected species populations.



NMFS Uses Observer Data to:

- Track the effectiveness of gear modifications
- Identify new fishing patterns
- Determine whether appropriate conservation measures are in place for commercial fisheries to reduce bycatch of marine mammals
- Identify ways for fishermen to fish more cleanly, thereby reducing bycatch and allowing for more fishing time

Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico Fisheries with Observer Programs in 2006:

Category I Fisheries

- Northeast sink gillnet
- Mid-Atlantic gillnet
- Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico large pelagics longline
- Mid-Atlantic mid-water trawl (including pair trawl)



Category II Fisheries

- North Carolina inshore gillnet
- Northeast anchored float gillnet
- Northeast drift gillnet
- Southeast Atlantic gillnet
- Southeastern U.S. Atlantic shark gillnet
- Mid-Atlantic bottom trawl
- Northeast mid-water trawl (including pair trawl)
- Northeast bottom trawl
- Mid-Atlantic haul/beach seine
- North Carolina long haul seine
- North Carolina roe mullet stop net
- Virginia pound net

Category III Fisheries

- Southeastern U.S. Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico shark bottom longline*
- Southeastern U.S. Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico shrimp trawl

*Observer coverage in this fishery is mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.



How Will You Know When You Have to Carry an Observer?



Fishermen and fishing industry representatives will be notified whenever possible to provide advance notification to a fishery that observer coverage will be required. Fishermen may be selected for observer coverage either by letter, phone, or direct request by NMFS personnel, designated contractors, or by observers themselves.

If selected to carry an observer, a vessel may not engage in any Category I or II fishing operation unless an observer is on board.

What are My Responsibilities When Carrying an Observer?

- Allowing the observer access to all areas of the vessel.
- Allowing the observer access to communications equipment and navigation equipment, when available on the vessel.
- Providing the observer with vessel locations by latitude and longitude, accurate to the minute or by loran coordinates.
- Allowing for the sampling, retention, and storage of marine mammal specimens and other protected species specimens, or target and non-target catch specimens, if adequate facilities are available and if feasible.
- Notifying the observer in a timely fashion when all commercial fishing operations are to begin and end.
- Providing accommodations and food to the observer equivalent to those provided to the crew.
- Allowing for the embarking and disembarking of the observer: ensuring that transfers of observers at sea are accomplished in a safe manner, via small boat or raft, during daylight hours as weather and sea conditions allow, and with the agreement of the observer(s) involved.
- Complying with other guidelines or regulations that NMFS may develop to ensure the effective deployment and use of observers.



What are the Safety Requirements for Carrying an Observer?

- Complying with the United States Coast Guard (USCG) safety requirements while at sea and obtaining and displaying a current Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination Decal (decals are valid for a period of two years).
- Allowing an observer, NMFS personnel, or designated observer service provider to visually inspect any safety or accommodation requirement if requested (50 CFR Part 600.746).



**For more information or questions regarding NMFS' observer coverage requirements, contact:
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